

When Division and Discord Comes, Part 1 - Acts 15:1-4 – April 20th, 2008

- Paul and Barnabas, just having ended their first missionary journey, are back at their home church in Antioch enjoying the fellowship.
- While in Antioch, they're met with a divisive group of Jews who came down from Judea spreading discord amongst the brethren.

- One thought is that chapter 15 is one of the most important chapters in the book of Acts because of what's at stake for the early church.
- It is for this reason that Luke, by the Holy Spirit, records this for us in his writing of this book. This is a most serious threat to the gospel.
- What these Jewish believers do will strike at the core of the finished work on the cross and create much confusion and division.

Proverbs 6:16-19 16 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. KJV

- Why does God hate the sowing of discord among brethren? Because of the serious damage it can do to people's faith in Christ.
- Satan has been trying from the beginning to destroy the early church, and this is yet another opportunity for him to divide it with discord.
- One commentator has suggested that; "this may be the greatest threat to the work of the gospel seen in the Book of Acts!"
- If this threat were to prevail, Christianity would become just another Jewish sect fading into the backdrop of obscurity.

1. It usually involves false teaching (Verse 1)

1 Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

v1 Some Jewish Christians from Judea come to Antioch and start spreading a false teaching to the brothers there in the church.

- These Judaizers, as they were called, were saying that the Gentiles had to adhere to Moses' law by being circumcised to be saved.

It was very difficult for some Jewish Christians to accept that Gentiles could be brought into the church as "equal partners" without first coming through the law of Moses. "It was one thing to accept the occasional God-fearer into the church, someone already in sympathy with Jewish ways; it was quite another to welcome large numbers of Gentiles who had no regard for the law and no intention of keeping it."

George Williams

"This was a direct attack upon the principle of salvation by faith and by faith alone and an attack upon the fellowship of saints and the oneness of the Body of Christ. It was all the more dangerous because it was plausible; because it made an instant appeal to the Jewish members of the church; because it had the apparent backing of the prestigious James (the false teachers were later disavowed by the apostles, but that made no difference to them or to the damage they did); because of the zeal with which it was spread by the legalizing faction in the church, which saw in the doctrine a way of maintaining the Jewish balance of power against the wholesale Gentile invasion of the church; and because of the swift root it took wherever it was spread."

John Philips, "Exploring Acts," Volume 2 p288

- It would almost seem as if the Jewish Christians are sort of jealous of the Gentiles becoming Christians, so they launch this effort.
- I'm finding in my own experience, especially in the ministry, that jealousy is at the root of false teachings and false accusations.
- The reason for this is because the false teacher or false accuser wants to be in control with the balance of power, all because of pride.

James 4:1-2 1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. NIV

Proverbs 13:10 Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice. NIV

2. It may warrant a sharp dispute (Verse 2)

2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

v2 This false teaching brings them into a sharp dispute and debate with Paul and Barnabas who are appointed to go to Jerusalem.

- Apparently, the dispute and the debate got so heated that they decided to travel all the way to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles.
- Why would Paul sharply dispute and debate with them about this? He never disputed or debated with anyone on his missionary trip.
- I suggest that the reason for this is because of the implications of what requiring circumcision meant; Jesus died for nothing!!!

Galatians 2:21-3:5 - 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" 3:1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing-if it really was for nothing? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? NIV

- Needless to say; "this is a false teaching, and it is a slap in the face of the Savior's crucifixion and resurrection."
- Jesus is all I need! It is finished! It's not Jesus and, or but, or when, or if, or anything, it's just Jesus!

3. It should keep us on track (Verses 3-4)

3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

v3 They're sent out and on the way go through Phoenicia and Samaria telling of the Gentiles conversions, which brings them gladness.

v4 Arriving in Jerusalem, they are welcomed by the church, apostles and elders, and report everything God was doing through them.

- I find it most interesting that they would take the time, while on their way, to "stay on message" as it were. They weren't sidetracked.

- I am convinced that one of the most dangerous threats to us as believers, and as a church, is getting derailed by division and discord.

"That, of course, was Satan's answer to Paul's evangelism: paralyze the church with inward strife; direct all energy against other believers; put the church on the defensive, keep it squabbling. It is significant that we have no record at this time of further plans for missionary activity and no record of souls being saved at Antioch. Evangelism had come to a halt. Controversy is one of the enemy's favorite tactics against the church.

John Phillips "Exploring Acts Volume 2 p289